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BUDGET MESSAGE FROM ASSEMBLYMEMBER JIM BEALL, JR.

Like you, I am a taxpayer. Like you, I am concerned about how my taxpayer dollar is spent by government. Like you, I want my tax dollars spent wisely. I want that money to work hard for us and I want it used in a way that will save us more tax dollars in the future. And like you, I am frustrated and disappointed with our failure to pass a timely budget which would avoid unnecessary impacts on our citizens and state services.

This is the end of my first term in the Assembly and I never experienced anything similar to the gridlock at the Capitol during my 26 years as a Santa Clara County Supervisor and a San Jose City Councilmember.

I have received many letters and phone calls from people opposing tax increases to balance the budget or on the flip side encouraging me not to give into an “all cuts” budget that would irrevocably harm our teachers, our children and the poor.

My priorities during this year’s budget were to avoid deep cuts that would have decimated the health and human services programs so vital to our elderly, disabled, and poor. I believe by denying these essential services to our most fragile community today, California’s taxpayers pay more tomorrow for health care costs, law enforcement, courts, and prisons. Some Californians may pay with their lives.

In June, the Assembly and Senate conference committee ironed out differences both houses may had on the budget, producing a spending plan that called for protecting funding for schools and health and human services. It also called for increasing taxes on the state’s highest income earners to avoid taxing the hard-hit middle class and working poor.

In early July, the conference committee’s budget proposal was presented in the Senate and Assembly and received a majority of votes in both houses but did not achieve the necessary two-thirds votes for approval. The Assembly Republicans who opposed it did not – despite demands from other legislators – offer their own version of a budget until Sept. 8. Their plan called for severe cuts to services to our poor, elderly, and disabled that would have created more problems and more bills for Californians to pay. It also would have relied on borrowing to balance the budget, which I and my fellow Democrats opposed. Plunging the state deeper into debt is not fiscally responsible and does not solve California’s long-range problems.

The two-thirds requirement is a stumbling block to approving a timely budget, enabling a handful of legislators to thwart the will of the majority in the Legislature as well as the majority of the electorate. This same band of lawmakers has kept it in their tool box year after year to hold the budget hostage in order to wring out concessions that will protect special interests.

On Sept. 16, the Legislature passed a budget, one that avoided slashes to schools and to the safety net that protects our most fragile citizens. Later that same day, Governor Schwarzenegger announced that he planned to veto the budget. The Governor was supportive of the entire budget except for a single provision he wanted that he didn't get. Disagreement over that one single provision is no excuse to shut down services for the developmentally disabled and make small business owners mortgage their homes to stay in business. Legislators will meet this week to discuss the Governor's announced veto of the budget compromise.

Although the budget is not perfect, we could not allow the people whose lives depend on state assistance or reimbursements to suffer. The budget fails to adequately address the billions in revenue we lose every year through the many tax loopholes that benefit the wealthy at the expense of the middle class and the working poor. The Legislature could have corrected this obvious inequity while balancing the budget this session except it was stopped by the super majority requirement.

City councils, county boards of supervisors, school boards, and water districts can pass their budgets without a two-thirds requirement. Why should the Legislature be different?

I believe it is imperative for Californians to end this paralyzing gridlock by ash-canning the two-thirds majority requirement. I will be working to ensure this is put on the ballot for the voters to approve. We must never have a hostage budget year like this again.